WE MUST TAKE CARE OF EACH OTHER:

WOMEN TALK ABOUT ABUSE

NWT Status of Women

March, 1990

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The NWT Advisory Council on the Status of Women was established by the Legislative Assembly in 1983. It advises the Minister Responsible for the Status of Women on issues of particular concern to women. The Council works towards the equal participation of women in all aspects of society, especially through research and community development.

It has six members and an office in Yellowknife. Please feel free to contact us with your comments or questions. We can be reached by phone at (403)920-6177 or fax at (403)873-0285 or by mail at Box 1320, Yellowknife, NWT X1A 2L9.

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This discussion paper is free and is available in English and Inuktitut syllabics. We would like to acknowledge the assistance of Andrew Tagak and Puulik Translations of Yellowknife and the NWT Language Bureau, Baffin Region for translation services.

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Phantom Warrior
by Dorothy J. Reyna

I sleep ever so lightly with tiredness burning in my chest
Waiting for the footsteps, the interruption of my rest.
I cling to the memories of walks in the park
Of flowers in the afternoons and kisses after dark.
The pounding of the footsteps grow louder in the hall.
The turning of the key is the warrior's call.
The terror of the night is the slamming of the door.
Lying still, feigning sleep, praying there be no more.

At once powerful fingers tearing in my hair
Being thrown to the wall as if he didn't care.
The sex that can be so tender grows painful in the dark
The territory claimed by the patriarch.

He looks ever so still, passed out upon the floor.
The puddles of vomit leading a path to a broken door.
A shattered lamp's a token of dying feelings inside,
But there's no place to run; there's no place to hide.

Today there is sunshine; tomorrow there's rain.
Yesterday's gentleness becomes today's pain.
When it is done, they're one and the same.

DEFINITIONS

"Family violence" is a general word. It refers to three kinds of abuse: wife abuse, child abuse (including child sexual abuse) and elder abuse. This discussion paper is about wife abuse. It uses the words **"wife abuse"** because it is a specific, not a general term. It also acknowledges the way violence usually happens - men beat women.

"Wife assault" is a part of "wife abuse". It refers to physical violence. It is the easiest to prove in court and often leaves permanent physical problems. Wife abuse also includes emotional, sexual, and economic abuse. It can be a part of every aspect of a woman's life. It may take her whole life to overcome the effects of abuse.

Throughout this paper the words "husband" and "wife" will include those who live in common-law relationships or are girlfriend and boyfriend. It means a relationship where men and women are partners.

The words **"violence"** and **"abuse"** are used throughout this paper. They both refer to psychological, emotional, financial, sexual, as well as physical activities that **violate** the dignity and respect of the individual.

PURPOSE

This paper will examine wife abuse from a woman's viewpoint. It will raise issues for discussion and debate. We hope that communities will use the paper to increase their knowledge, and work towards developing community-based solutions. We also hope that communities will share their progress in developing solutions with others and thus help each other. Wife abuse is a serious social issue. Women are leading the way, but communities must work together to make changes.

Women's experience of abuse is the focus of this paper. While there are other issues which the paper does not discuss in full, we feel that the underlying experience of abuse must be fully discussed before solutions to other related problems can be found. This viewpoint has not yet been fully shared and discussed by NWT communities.

The personal stories in the quotes are real stories as told by women. They have been taken from a number of sources, including the "Spousal Assault Network", produced by the Department of Culture and Communications, Government of the N.W.T.

We encourage you to use the questions at the end of each section to help get discussion going. We hope the paper will be used by groups and in workshops; by women, men and young people. We would like to hear from you about what you think of the paper, and about ways you are using it to help make changes.

ASSUMPTIONS

1. Violence should have no place in the family or in women's lives.

2. Violence affects everyone in the community.

3. The community has both a responsibility and a right to get involved.

4. Violence happens primarily to women and children. It is usually men who initiate the violence. It is usually men who are willing to use violence to settle disputes.

5. Once violence has started, it will not stop by itself. Active intervention, from all parts of the community, is needed. Often, women have to leave in order for men to take their behavior seriously and begin to make changes.

6. Violence towards women and children results in part from an imbalance in power between women and men. Men are more powerful physically. They are more powerful economically - they earn more money and may be the sole income for the family. Men are more powerful politically - most mayors or chiefs, hamlet or band councillors, and MLAs are male. Women do not participate as fully as they could in decision-making.

Do you agree with these assumptions?

What are your assumptions about wife abuse? your family's?

HOW WOMEN ARE ABUSED

Physical Abuse: push * shove * slap * kick * punch * choke * bite * break bones * lock in or out of the home * leave her in an unsafe place * throw objects * murder.

Emotional and Psychological Abuse: put-down * criticize her constantly * break down her belief system (cultural or religious) * insult her or her friends * call her names * humiliate her in public * threaten to leave or throw her out * punish or threaten the children * harass her about real or imagined affairs * destroy pets or property * be jealous * control her contact with friends * control her talk * make her account for every minute, every action * control with fear * threaten to kill her * threaten to kill himself.

Sexual Abuse: force unwanted sex * demand she wear more or less provocative clothing * force sex with objects, friends, animals * insist she act out pornographic fantasies * deny her sexuality * make demeaning remarks about women * have affairs with other women * brag about affairs * force sex after beatings.

Economic Abuse: allow her no money of her own * force her to hand over every penny, whether or not she earns her own money * force her to account for every cent * not allow her to work or go to school.

It is important to think about the kinds of abuse that happen to women. Have you ever thought of these things as abuse before?

Do any of these types of abuse happen to you? To your mother? To your sisters? To anyone else in your community?

MYTHS AND REALITIES

A MYTH IS A BELIEF THAT IS SHARED BY MANY PEOPLE, BUT IS NOT TRUE.

MYTH: She likes being beaten.
REALITY: Women do not like being beaten. No woman likes to have broken bones or be maimed or emotionally scarred. No one has the right to assault another person.

MYTH: She deserves to be abused.
REALITY: This myth blames the victim and removes the responsibility for the abuse from the abuser. No human being deserves to be beaten.

MYTH: She provokes it by nagging, arguing.
REALITY: This myth also blames the victim. In most cases there is no verbal argument before a physical beating. A man who wishes to abuse his wife can use anything as a reason. There is no excuse for violence.

MYTH: Abused women are always passive and submissive.
REALITY: Abused women may have learned that if they are assertive they may be hurt more. Abuse is not dependent on whether women are passive or assertive.

MYTH: Only certain kinds of women get battered.
REALITY: There are no typical cases, no stereotypes. Women from all income levels, all cultures and races, from cities and small communities are abused. Abusers come from all occupations. Lawyers, politicians, judges, teachers, trappers, contractors and others may beat their wives.

MYTH: Stress causes men to beat their wives.
REALITY: Stress is not a cause. Some men choose to handle their frustrations by beating their partners.

MYTH: Wife-beaters are mentally ill.
REALITY: Canadian research shows that only 3% of abusers are even temporarily mentally ill.

MYTH: Male hormones and sex drive cause acts of violence.
REALITY: Sex does not cause violence. All evidence shows that violence within the family is socially-learned behavior.

MYTH: Alcohol or drugs cause men to beat their wives.
REALITY: Alcohol is involved in a large number of incidents of wife abuse. Alcohol is often used as an excuse. It allows the blame to be shifted away from the batterer - "I didn't know what I was doing".

MYTH: Wife abuse is a private family matter, an argument that gets out of hand.
REALITY: This myth gives the police, courts, social agencies, family, and community the right to ignore the problem and allows the violence to continue. Battering affects everyone in the community. It could be your mother, wife, friend, sister, neighbour, or someone else you know. Experts estimate that as many as half of all Canadian women will be abused at some time in their lives. Wife assault is a crime and against the law.

MYTH: Assaulted women could leave their abusive partners if they wanted to.
REALITY: Women stay in abusive relationships for many reasons: commitment to their marriage; hope he will change; no money; no place to live; no job; fear of further harm to themselves and their children. It can take many trys before a woman is finally able to leave.

MYTH: Pregnant women are protected from attack.
REALITY: Women may find that beatings get worse when they are pregnant. Violence often starts when a woman becomes pregnant. She is less able to access resources and becomes more dependent on her husband. Husbands may take advantage of this dependency knowing that their wives will be less able to do something about it.

MYTH: Men should be strong and silent about their feelings.
REALITY: Men need to be able to share their feelings and fears with their spouse and other people. A lack of communication between a husband and wife makes the problem of wife abuse harder to deal with. People need to share what they are feeling, especially about wife abuse, with others.

How many of these myths do you believe? Do your friends believe?

How does your belief in these myths affect your behaviour? Others' behaviour?

What can you or your community do to change these myths?

VIOLENCE: WOMEN AS INDIVIDUALS

What is it like to be an abused woman?

Denial

Women often find it hard to even begin to understand the abuse. Denial allows women to ignore the reality of an abusive situation. Excuses for abuse are used by the abused woman and others around her so that no one admits or deals with it. Abused women often express denial through phrases such as:

"He didn't mean it, he loves me."
"He was under pressure from his job."
"The kids were hassling him."
"I should have had dinner ready for him on time."
"Men will be men."
"He promised me he wouldn't do it again."
"He was drinking."
"He can't control his temper."

As well as denying the abuse to herself, a woman will deny the abuse to others. She may tell the nurse or RCMP officer more excuses. It is just as hard to admit the abuse to others as it is to admit it to herself.

"I fell downstairs."
"I ran into a door."
"I fell off the ski-doo."

Excuses allow a woman not to face the reality of her situation. She must overcome her denial and stop making excuses before the cycle of violence can be broken.

Even after a woman has admitted the abuse happens, she may downplay the seriousness of it. This allows her to escape from facing her real situation. She may say things like:

"This kind of thing only happens to other people not me."
"It's not so bad."
"If I could just be a better wife."
"After all, I'm the one who married him."
"I thought it only happened to people on welfare. My husband is a doctor."
"He never left a mark on me. I'm not a battered woman."

Fear

Fear is a big part of an abused woman's life - fear for her safety, for her children, fear that the abuse will continue or get worse. Abused women are both afraid to stay and afraid to go; staying is a fear they already know; leaving is a fear of the unknown. A common story describes this fear:

"My husband threatened he would kill me if he ever got wind of my plans to leave him. He says, 'If you leave me, I'll find you. No matter how long it takes, I'll track you down. You can't get away from me. When I find you you'll wish you were dead. I'll destroy you. I'll not only kill you but I'll destroy anyone who helps you get away from me. I'll kill you, the children and then I'll take my own life.' "

It is any wonder that women stay when faced with such fear?

Isolation and Feeling Alone

Isolation means physical and emotional distance from others. An abused woman thinks she is alone, that no one else experiences what she experiences. A violent husband may work very hard to keep her feeling isolated. He may control her activities and limit outside contact; he may also be rude and obnoxious to her family. The woman's family and friends may be unaware of what is happening to her or just not want to interfere. They, too, believe the myths about abuse. A woman has no way of checking her perception of her world to see if this is normal. She becomes lonely and dependent on her husband for her sense of worth, the very person who promotes her isolation.

> **"They had one vehicle and she was not allowed to use it unless she had his permission. If she needed to go to the store, she would go with him. On rare occasions she was allowed to go out alone but only under certain conditions. She had to be back when he designated or else she would be in trouble, which meant a beating. When she did return within her allotted time, she would have to suffer a barrage of accusations about what men she saw, went to bed with, or flirted and teased. Other than her occasional outings to shop, she was not allowed to go anywhere."**

She Blames Herself

Abused women often accept blame for the abuse. When a woman accepts the blame, she, like the community, believes the myths about violence in the home: she is to blame, she provokes the violence, she did something wrong and caused the beating. Her husband reinforces this by saying:

> ***"Why did you make me hit you? If you would just behave I wouldn't have to hit you."***

Family, friends, church and community may reinforce this myth as well by saying:

> ***"Your husband is such a nice guy. You must have done something wrong."***
> ***"You married him, you must like it."***
> ***"It is up to you to be a better wife."***
> ***"Marriage is for life, you can't break up a family no matter what - try to be a better person."***

The result is a woman who plans her life to please her husband, accepting the violence as her fault and freeing him from all responsibility.

> **"When you leave, you're really torn that somebody could treat you like that when they supposedly love you. But after all my years of marriage I have to realize that I can't help my husband. He has to help himself. As women we're responsible for ourselves and our children. Everything else is second, including our husbands."**

For every victim blamed, there is an offender excused.

Learned Helplessness

A battered woman often feels as if she can't control her life. She has feelings of helplessness, hopelessness and utter despair. She believes that she cannot do anything to change her situation. She feels trapped. She sees her husband as all powerful. She is unable to take action to help herself or her children. She becomes depressed, passive, feels powerless and believes she has no choice but to accept the abuse. Once she believes she cannot change the abuse, she gives up. She becomes nervous all the time waiting for the next flare up. She loses her ability to think ahead and make plans for her safety. She thinks no one can help her.

"A couple of times I tried leaving him. I took nothing hoping he would leave me and the kids alone. It was really hard to go. I always had a reason for leaving. I was either tired of the abuse or just fed up with his constant drinking. The kids would often say "Mommy, why don't we leave Daddy?" and that's what made me realize things were not right."

Lack of Self-Esteem

A woman's sense of worth, self-confidence and belief in her own abilities has been damaged. Most humiliating is the fact that she is being beaten by someone she loves and who is supposed to love, honour and respect her as a person. A woman begins to believe the names she is called - stupid, lazy, ugly, whore, slut, useless, bitch. Leaving takes great courage and strength. She must overcome her own doubts as well as going against her husband in a very open and public manner.

"I was putting on a pretty good front for the public, but inside I was dying. My self-esteem was nil and I felt like I was losing my sanity. I felt subhuman and very paranoid around him and other people. I was scared and depressed and felt like I was trapped in a corner with no way out. I have lost weight and do not look good. I tried to hide the bruises from the kids and other people because I was so embarrassed and so ashamed."

"After you've been beaten, humiliated, put down, shamed and in absolute terror for years, you're not a person any more, you're a zombie. It's like I died. I didn't even cry anymore."

Hope for Change

An abused woman often has hope that her husband will change, that he will keep his promises not to abuse her again and that he will return her love. The myth that she likes abuse is wrong. She does not stay because she likes it. She stays for many reasons, one of which is hope for better days. This hope is a powerful force that keeps women in abusive relationships.

"I thought if I could just prove to him how much I loved him, he'd change."

Taking his abuse becomes a way of proving her love. Making other changes (dropping friends, quitting a job, believing she deserved the abuse) all become part of hoping he will change.

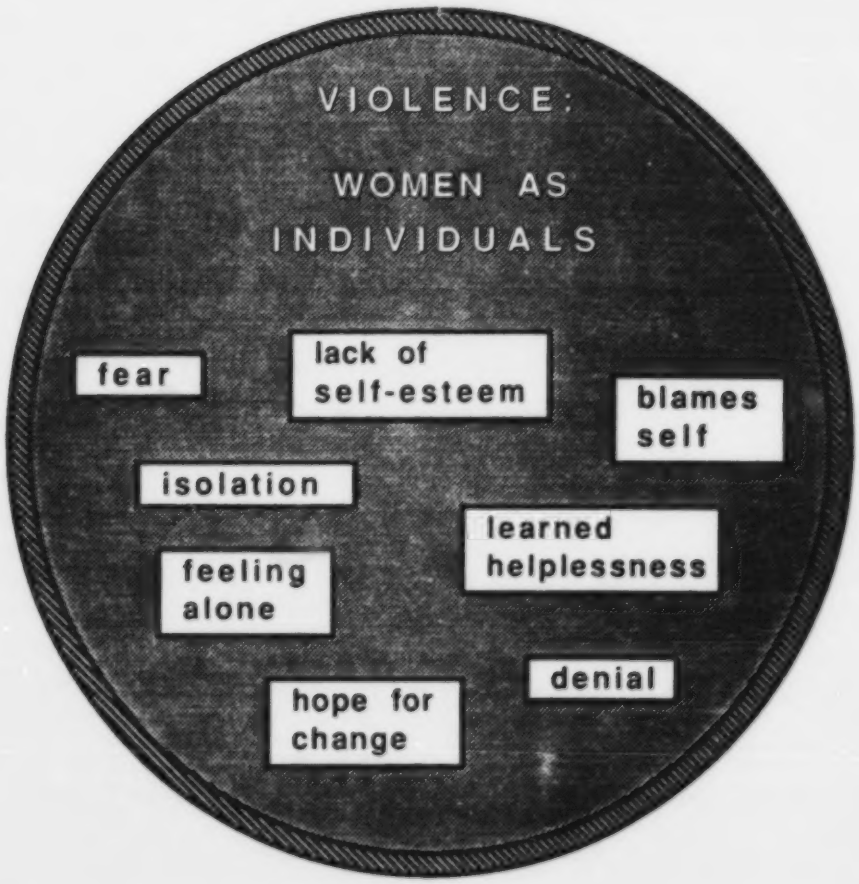
"I felt responsible for him and for keeping the family together. My belief was that the woman is the heart of the family and she is the one to keep the family together. I am not as important as my husband and children; I would forget about myself and take care of them. I also had this faith in my husband that he could lick this problem but he needed my help to do so. I felt I had failed and had let things get to this point. The only thing that kept me going was my children, although they were nervous and scared by all the turmoil."

Is someone you know in a violent relationship? What are they feeling? What are they doing?

If you were in an abusive situation, how would you feel?

What would you do to deal with these feelings? and with the violence?

Are YOU in an abusive relationship?



VIOLENCE: WOMEN IN THEIR FAMILIES

Role of Women in the Family

The two-parent family is considered the ideal in our society. Many people feel that the family should stay together at all costs. They feel that keeping a family together is more important than the safety of individual members. They also believe that children need to have a relationship with their father in the home, regardless of how poor that relationship is or the fact that children in a violent home are often in danger of abuse from the father.

"She should stay for the sake of the family."
"A woman's place is in the home."
"He's a good father even though he beats her."

Families may stay together for all the wrong reasons. Children, as well as their mothers, are subjected to danger and possible permanent injury every day of their lives. Pressuring an abused woman to keep the family together endangers her safety and takes away her ability to provide good care for her children.

Relationship With Her Husband

A woman's relationship with an abusive husband is not positive. The physical, emotional and psychological stress of trying to survive each day can be overwhelming for an abused woman.

The fear continues.....

> **"You're always on your guard. I put an army around me, so that nobody could touch the little person that was me. On the outside it's all black and blue and it's full of stitches and it looks wounded; but the person inside of me, that's mine. I wouldn't let anyone touch it."**

Her self-esteem gets worse.....

> **"I remember this one incident where I tried to commit suicide because I thought maybe this boyfriend had stopped loving me becuase he stopped beating me. I thought, maybe I'm not good enough anymore."**

He threatens her.....

An abusive husband will use any kind of threat against a woman and her children to keep them from leaving. He will threaten their lives, destroy their belongings or pets, and keep her from seeing her family and friends. His purpose is to keep her under his control. A woman lives with fear and does not know where her life will go. The relationship does not provide support to the woman or her husband. It is not a healthy relationship.

> **"And it's hard to trust too, when for most of your life you've seen a guy break every promise and say nice things to you just to get what he wants."**

Leaving

Leaving an abusive situation creates problems for both mothers and their children. Women often make the decision to leave only when their children become abused as well.

> **"That night he beat my daughter up too, because she was crying. I knew then that I had to get out of there to save my daughter and myself. I was scared that he would kill both of us. I went to the nurse and she helped me get to the transition house."**

"The kids were quite a handful. They'd been through a lot and had a hard time adjusting to the new school and the new town. And I was so strung out, I'd be screaming at them one minute and hugging them the next. It was a rough time for all of us."

"While we were away from home, they put me through Hell. I needed to get a job to support us but they wouldn't let me out of their sight because they were afraid I would leave them too. They wanted to go home and hoped their dad had stopped drinking. Finally, I couldn't take any more and went back to John with his promise to quit drinking. I thought I was doing the best for the kids, but soon John had broke his promise. Now I realize that staying with John was the worst thing for the kids."

Parenting

An abused and battered woman often does not have enough time or energy to meet her children's growing needs. Too often she is just trying to survive herself. She feels unable to deal with her children when they express their feelings about violence at home. Children may respond by misbehaving at school or at home or by becoming withdrawn and silent. This is hard to deal with for the abused women; not only must she deal with what is happening to her and her children but she must also deal with a husband who may beat her because she is a "lousy mother." As a woman and mother she is assumed to bear full responsibility for all the relationships in her family. A child from a violent home says it this way:

"At this time my mom was also an alcoholic. It was the only way she knew how to escape. It would have helped to have had someone to talk to, but with your mother being an alcoholic, there's really not a whole lot you can talk to her about. There was just nobody else."

Children Seeing Violence

Children seeing violence are often beaten themselves. This may happen as a regular event or be part of the abuse suffered by the mother. Neither is healthy.

"When I get beaten up, the children see it too and try to stop him; then he starts beating them up or chases them out in the middle of the night in the middle of the winter."

"If my mom is going to die I want to die with her. If mom dies I'll kill myself. I'll get even with him."

"I work in a shelter for battered women and children. So many of the problems we try to deal with are the direct result of children never feeling loved, never feeling special, never feeling worth anything. So many kids in our society are desperately grasping at straws of attention ... they'll take any tenderness even if it's preceded by a beating or sexual advances. We could do so much towards reducing violence of all kinds in our society if only, as a society, we would communicate that we value our children, and that we value women."

Children Learning Violence

Even when a father has been removed from the home, the effects of seeing abuse continue long into the future. Boys have learned that to get their way, they need to use violence. Girls have learned to be passive and accept the abuse. Studies show that these boys often grow up to be abusers and these girls often grow up to be abused.

"When my son was four or five, I saw him coming at me with his fists one time and he hit a brick wall, twice in front of me to show me he was mad. I got scared, and I left him standing by the door when I ran upstairs. I ran upstairs and I started to cry. I just started to vibrate with all the memories of the times I had gotten beaten by his father and other men. He came over and he said, Mommy what's the matter? I said, I thought I saw your dad in that split second when you threw your fists at me. And I started to think - it's starting all over again, even though you're five years old. Part of me tells me it's starting all over again."

"What kind of people are my children going to become, seeing us or hearing us live this way? Will my son abuse his wife or girlfriend as he's seen his father do? Will my daughter live in fear and dread of every man she meets? For them, if not for me, I've got to do something. But instead, I stay, and stay, and stay for what seems like an eternal hell. I can't see my way out. I'm fearful of losing family respect for my failed marriage, afraid of censure about my religious convictions, fearful of a terrible reputation with my own friends (the few who are left). Finally I become obsessed with a fear of losing my respect for myself, and for my sanity - what's left of it."

"I'm all mixed up ... They tell me in school that violence is wrong. But I see it all the time at home, and on TV, and in movies. I really don't understand what I'm supposed to be like anymore."

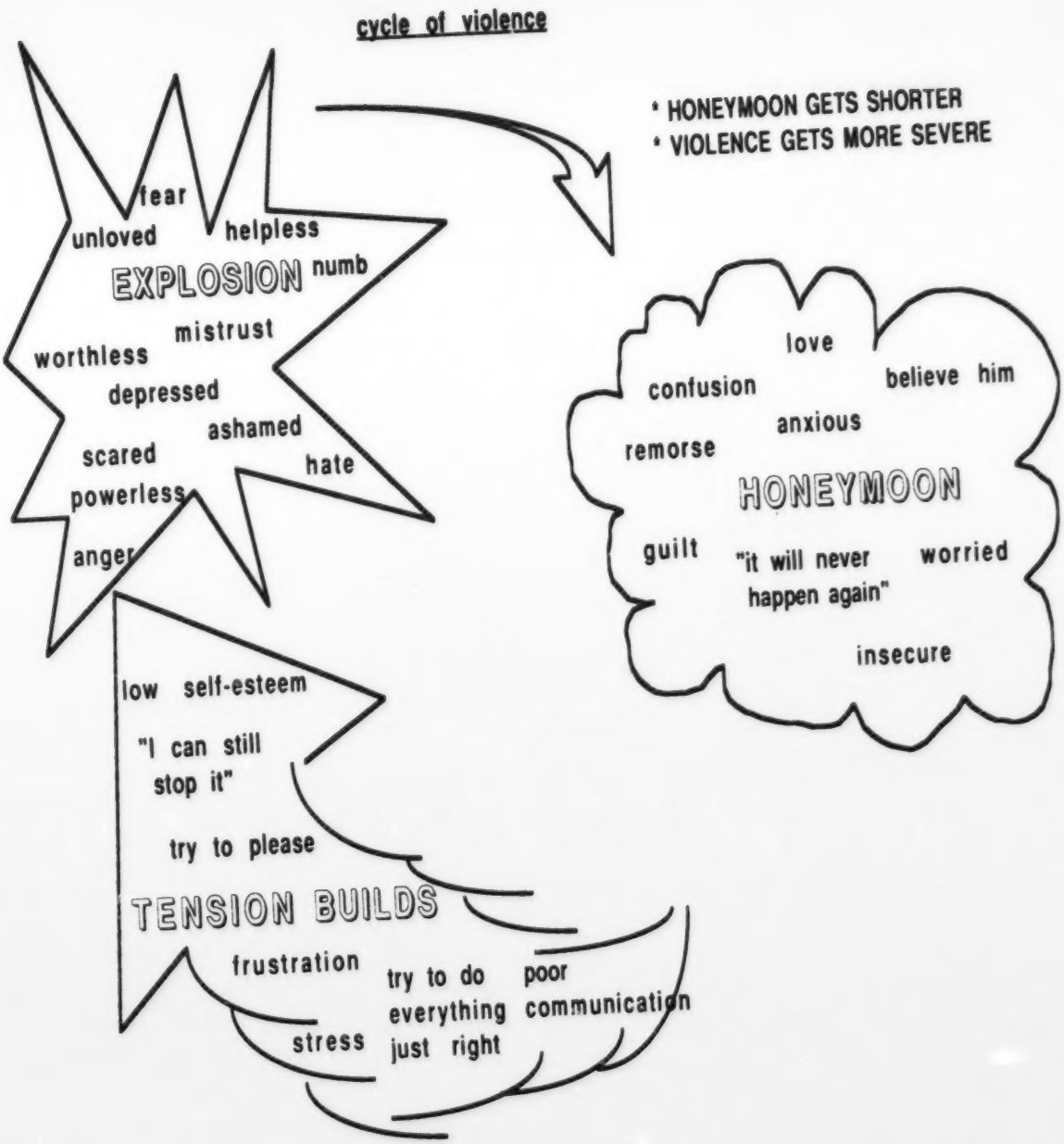
"I have nothing but contempt for my mother. I can't stand her weakness. For 20 years, she has stood by and let him get away with murder. The worst time was when he beat her so bad she ended up in hospital. The police wanted her to lay charges. She did, but the next day she dropped them. She went back to him."

Cycle of Violence

An abused woman may stay in a relationship because she still loves her husband. There have been good times as well as bad times over the years. Women usually want the abuse, not the relationship, to end. In abusive relationships, there is a cycle of violence which repeats itself over and over again. **Phase one is the tension building phase**. During this phase, tension is high, the husband lashes out at those around him and little acts of abuse occur. The wife accepts these frustrations and believes she can head off further abuse.

Eventually the tension gets so bad that an explosion occurs. **Phase two is the explosion**. The husband takes his anger and frustration out on those around him. This phase is very dangerous and severe violence and abuse often take place. Many women will deny the seriousness and extent of abuse and are just glad to have survived one more time.

Phase three is the honeymoon. The physical abuse is over and the abuser says he's sorry and tries to make it up. He convinces her he can control himself, she believes him and a good time happens in the family. Unfortunately this phase doesn't last and soon the cycle repeats itself. It will not stop without active intervention.


cycle of violence
• HONEYMOON GETS SHORTER
• VIOLENCE GETS MORE SEVERE
fear
unloved
helpless
EXPLOSION
numb
mistrust
worthless
depressed
ashamed
scared
hate
powerless
anger
love
confusion
believe him
anxious
remorse
HONEYMOON
guilt
"it will never happen again"
worried
insecure
low self-esteem
"I can still stop it"
try to please
TENSION BUILDS
frustration
try to do everything just right
poor communication
stress

Violence in the home has a big impact on a woman's relationship with both her children and husband. Children and women are not safe in a home where abuse is used to solve problems by the husband. Children do not benefit either from the abuse or from a mother who passively accepts the abuse.

Children are our future. They deserve the best possible start that we can give them. It is time to re-think the myths. It is time to recognize that such attitudes are oppressive for a woman - especially while she and her children are being abused. Change rarely happens by keeping a violent family together.

What makes a good father? husband?

Do you know of ways men choose to control their wives?

What is the husband's responsibility to the relationship?

Why is it so hard for women to leave?

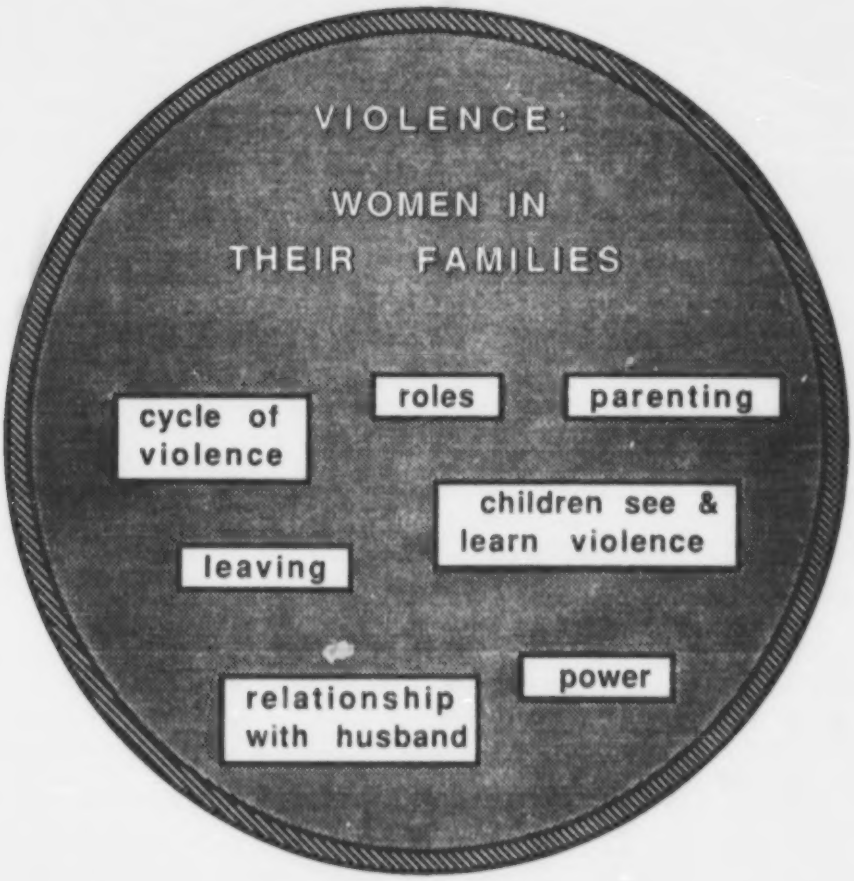
Why is it only the woman's job to keep the family happy?

Is it fair that women are expected to make the relationship work?

Do you know of children who live in abusive homes?

How can the power in a family be more evenly shared?

How can the cycle of violence be broken?



VIOLENCE: WOMEN IN THEIR COMMUNITY

"The dignity of womanhood must be accepted in our society. There is still residual thinking, even in our schools, and our homes, that mom is dad's property. That thinking must be changed."

(Bishop Sperry)

"That's what I saw in the community when I was growing up. If a woman is getting beaten, you figure that's love. If her man really wants her, he's going to get jealous and beat her."

Communities accept and reinforce the belief that it is okay for a husband to use violence to get his way with his wife and children.

Community Denial

Communities allow violence to happen by denying that it happens, by making excuses for the abuser, by blaming the woman, by pressuring the woman to keep the family together and by believing the myths about wife abuse.

"The community don't understand the problem, because how many times I was beaten up and everyone would say why I reported on him and were disgusted with me."

"I couldn't go to the alcohol counsellor because it was his brother, so I went to the priest. The priest told me that my place was with my husband and I should try to do what my husband told me. When my husband found out I talked to the priest, he was really mad because he didn't want me talking to people about him and he beat me up again."

The community's denial about known abusers makes it difficult for women to reach out to other people in the community. Those who are supposed to help either can't or won't.

"When I saw people from my community, they all wanted me to go back to my husband. They said he didn't mean it and he wanted me to come back. Lots of women came into the transition house and I knew that I could only stay there for a little while. I didn't know what to do. I looked for a job, but I got married really young and I don't know what job I could do. I was really nervous thinking about working in a new job with people I didn't know."

Leaders as Batterers

Because women are often blamed and the abuser excused, it is very hard for a woman to seek help in a community. The attitudes of individuals make it hard to address the problems of wife abuse. Negative attitudes can be seen at the highest levels. Some of our worst abusers may be community leaders.

"...This was a case where the woman who was savagely attacked had earlier been drinking with some men, including the offender. And the chief or community leader stated that she cannot go partying like a man and she has to be put in her place. In the context of what this (Legislative) Assembly heard a few years ago from the Task Force (on Spousal Assault) chaired by Mr. Bayly, that this attitude still prevails is disturbing to say the least.
...I simply want to bring attention to the fact that even in this day and age there are still community leaders who feel that it is acceptable behaviour to beat spouses and women generally."

(Ted Richard, former MLA Yellowknife South, Legislative Assembly, 1988)

Community Loyalty

When a woman leaves a violent home, the community may respond with disbelief, denial, ignorance, or pity. By accepting violence as normal, the community makes it very hard for her to leave or speak about her situation. Communities blind themselves to the fact that wife abuse happens....our community is a good community and would not accept such behavior....if we are loyal to our home settlement we do not want to admit that wife abuse occurs. It is difficult to accept that it is our people, our parents, our grandparents who may be abusers. It is also hard to accept that wife abuse goes from one generation to another.

"My grandfather used to beat my grandmother up quite steadily. She has kidney problems, arthritis, things like that that are still affecting her today from the violence that was inflicted on her when she was young. Once my grandfather beat her up so badly that he had to take her out in the bush and hide her for three months, so she could recover."

"Staying away from family, friends, and home was harder than I thought it was going to be. I felt I couldn't be around my friends or family for fear John would show up or bother them. Being cut off from everyone was just too hard. The kids started to blame me because they missed their dad and blamed me for taking them away from their family and friends. They knew what was going on at home. Like me, they tried to do everything right, thinking they could make it better."

Lack of Support

Many abused women find it very hard to survive once they have made the decision to leave. Too often there is no shelter or safe place. Too often there are no supports of any kind - friends, family, social services, the legal system, the community. Too often she is told to take it, try harder, or ignore it. Too often she is told that she caused her own abuse, that she never had it so good and that it is she who must change.

"June hold her mother about her husband beating her and her mother's response was to "try harder". June stayed. Eventually, she was forced to flee from her husband, taking refuge one night in a friend's house. The next morning her husband appeared at the friend's door, telling her how much he loved and needed June. The friend let him in, and then urged June to return home because she hated to see him so hurt. The friend had not supported June, nor did she really understand the dynamics of abuse. June's feelings were virtually ignored. She felt she had no choice but to return to her husband."

It is very hard to survive as a single parent. It is hard for a woman to be responsible for all the needs of the kids, as well as her own personal needs. Her options for change could be limited by low wages, low education, no child care, few job opportunities, no support from her family and the community and few professional resources in her community. She is often forced to return to an abusive situation. To return means her husband has won and it will be harder to leave again. Is it any wonder that so many women stay or keep returning?

Nowhere to Live

"I went to Housing so they could give me a house. They asked me if I was going to put a peace bond on my husband and they asked me if I was sure this time that I would not go back to my husband. I felt like a little girl that had done something wrong and I had to apologize for it. I was frustrated and confused. Lots of people make me feel like I can't do anything right, just like my husband made me feel.
... I was put on a waiting list, but they didn't know when a house would be empty. I went back many times, but they never knew when a house would be ready. Sometimes I think it would be easier to go back to my husband. Housing takes so long. It's so hard to go back week after week."

Few Resources

There are few resources in the communities to help. Many communities need and don't have shelter for women and their children. The shelters that do exist are filled to capacity and often have to turn women away. In 1988-89, over 1500 women and children in the NWT used shelter services.

Existing shelters mainly provide crisis intervention services and very short term assistance. There is little programming such as counselling, child care, and ongoing support.

There are only two counselling programs in the NWT that offer services to violent families. Community programs such as alcohol counsellors, drop-in centres or friendship centres often try to help women and families. However their workers are already busy and are not usually trained in helping abused women. There are few professionals and little training available.

Women's self-help groups have started in some communities, but they get little support from the community. They often meet secretly because the men would forbid "their women" to participate if they knew. Other agencies often do not support these groups by referring potential clients.

No Guarantee of Safety

There is no guarantee of safety if a woman decides to leave. If he's arrested, he will be released shortly thereafter. It may be months before a court hearing is set. A man, believing he has lost control over his wife when she pressed charges, often becomes more dangerous. He may do almost anything to get her back and under his control once again. Murder becomes a possibility.

"Sally was married to a man who had repeatedly pointed a gun to her head. One night, while drunk he got the gun out and threatened to shoot her and then himself. She stayed up all night with him trying to talk him out of it. She succeeded and when he finally fell asleep, she left."

"She lived in a shelter for more than a month. Her friends told her he was hunting her and wanted to kill her. Her employer was also afraid for her. She didn't go to work during that month and literally stayed in hiding."

The potential for continued violence does not stop once she has taken action to protect herself. Women may fear for their lives. It is not hard to understand why women stay when faced with possible death. Some women have become so afraid they have killed their husbands rather than be killed themselves.

Alcohol Abuse

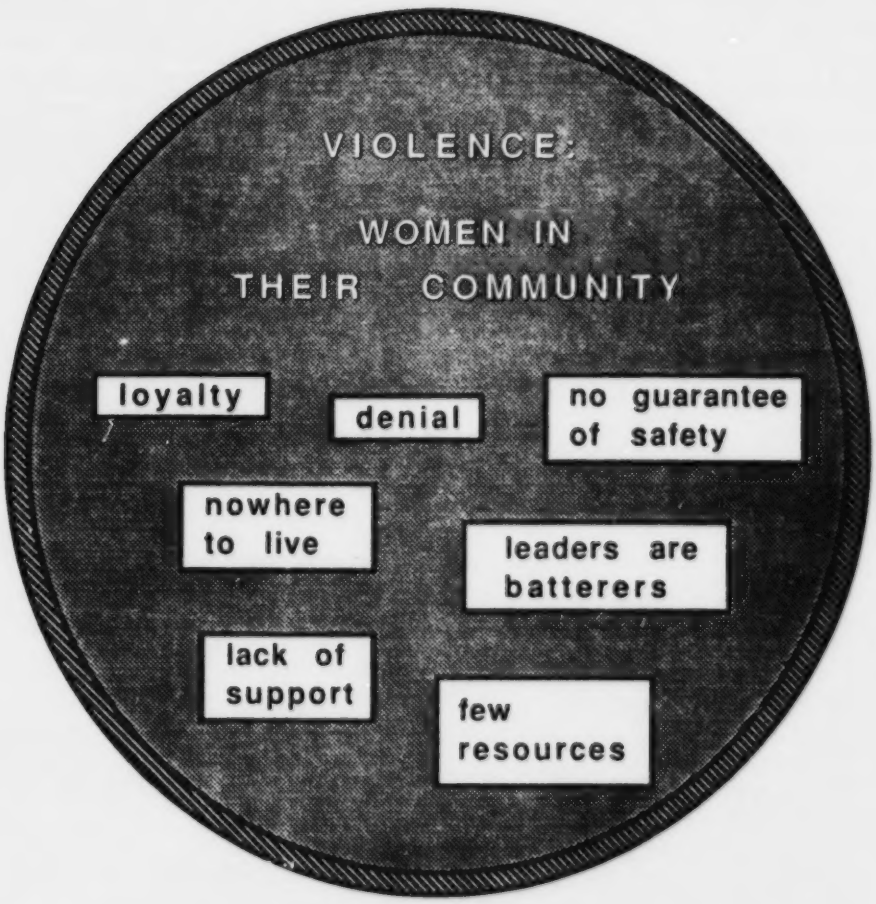
In our communities alcohol has become accepted as a reason for wife abuse. It must be understood that alcohol does not cause the abuse, it is just an excuse for violent behavior. Alcohol abuse is an excuse just like drug abuse, lack of a job, stress from a job, or poverty. Abuse does not stop when the alcohol abuse does, or when he gets a job or when he changes jobs.

Is being drunk used as an excuse for abuse in your community?

Why do women and children leave the community? Should men leave instead?

Are there leaders in your community who batter their wives? How can leadership be made more responsible?

How can communities take action to deal with wife abuse? Who should do it?



VIOLENCE: WOMEN IN SOCIETY

Power and Control

> **" ... there are fundamental links between family violence (wife abuse) and the belief many of us have that it is right for some people in our society to use power - force if necessary - to control others."**
> (Linda McLeod)

Violence against women, including wife abuse, has been going on for a long time. It is part of our cultural institutions and belief systems. These institutions and beliefs have developed over hundreds and thousands of years. In most societies, men have been thought to be more powerful than women. This power is seen in many different ways. Men earn more money than women. Men's work has been seen as more important than women's. Men hold more jobs as political and religious leaders than women. Men do more assaults against women than women do against men. The use of power to control others is called **patriarchy**. It allows those in authority, most often male, to control, manipulate, and exploit others. Society supports this use of power by allowing wife abuse to continue.

For example, the response of the legal system to wife abuse does not adequately meet anyone's needs. The police may take a long time to come, or they may not come at all. Peace bonds don't work. There is often a long wait for court hearings and once a woman does get to court, sentences are light or non-existent, or fines are imposed which often the woman ends up paying. Abusers are not treated harshly by the legal system and victims are often revictimized.

Roles

Women and girls play certain roles that define them as passive, emotional, submissive, and accepting of whatever life brings them no matter how painful or destructive. Men and boys are socialized to be aggressive, fearless, self-sufficient, and self-reliant.

> **"If no father or mother in their right minds would tolerate being told that their son would be discriminated against, paid less, physically violated, denied a fair chance in society, then how on earth could they accept being told that about their daughter. ...When I fight for the equality of my daughter in this society, I am doing the same for my son, who must be free to cry without shame, to feel his body without guilt, to look upon the opposite sex and see more than breasts and buttocks, to see complete, whole human beings who are good to talk with, work with, marry and love."**
>
> (Allan Gould)

An abused woman is often in an unwinable situation: if she leaves in order to survive, she is deserting her husband and family; if she stays, she is accused of needing and enjoying the abuse. The difficulty in defining her role for herself creates a lot of conflict for her.

He Can/She Can't

He smiles at her
he's friendly
She smiles at him
she's flirting

He tells a dirty joke
he's funny
She tells a dirty joke
she's crude

His pants are too tight
he gained weight
Her skirt is too tight
she's "asking for it"

He pats her on the head
he's fatherly
She pats him on the head
she's forward

He does what <u>she</u> says
he's a wimp
She does what <u>he</u> says
she's a good wife

He swears
he's a real man
She swears
she's no lady

He got a good job
he's responsible
She got a good job
she's neglecting family

He cries when he's sad
he's a sissy
She cries when she's sad
she's just a woman

He does housework
he's an equal partner
She does housework
she's doing her duty.

He wants to be mayor
he's a leader
She wants to be mayor
she's too pushy

He needs time for himself
He deserves a break
She needs time for herself
she's being selfish

He takes care of the kids
he's an exceptional father
She takes care of the kids
she's doing what's expected.

He's sleeping with her
he's scored
She's sleeping with him
she's a slut

Do you believe that men are more important than women?

Do you believe that men have the right to abuse women?

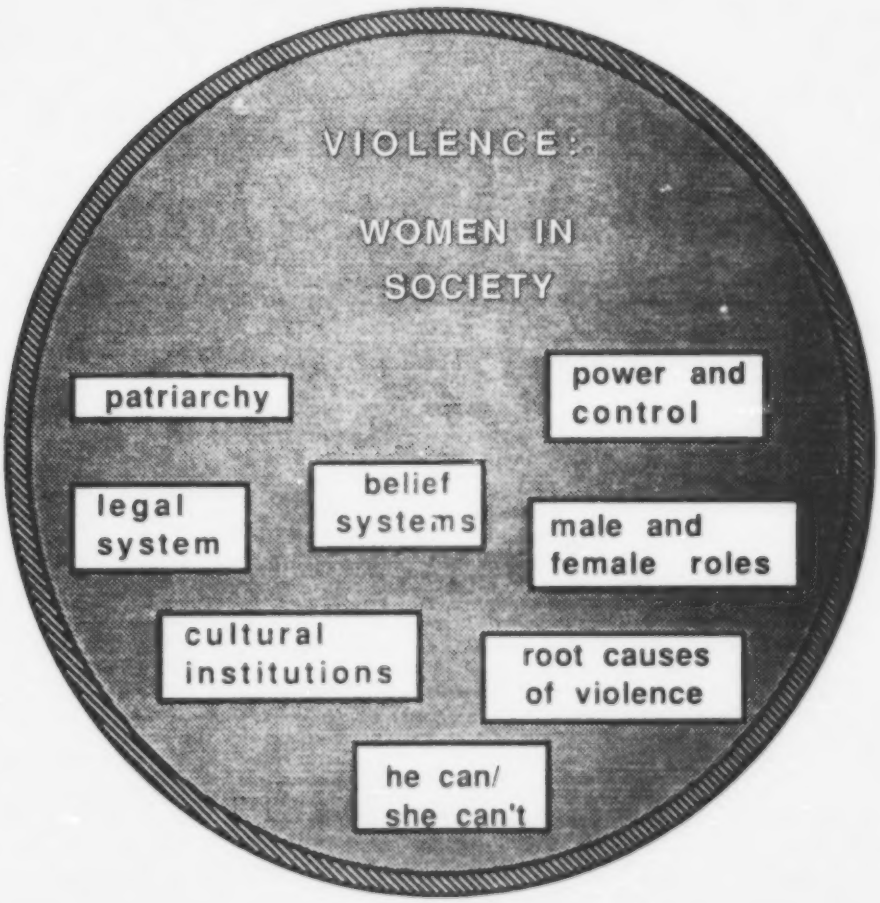
What beliefs do you have about how girls and boys should be raised?

How do you raise your children?

Have you heard of patriarchy?

Do you think our society is patriarchal?

Do you believe that wife abuse and other forms of family violence are associated with the misuse of power?



MAKING CHANGES - HEALING

Statistics tell us that one out of eight women in Canada is battered. In the NWT, it is estimated that one out of four is battered. There is a tendency to under-report wife abuse due to the fears and attitudes we have talked about in this paper. Women tend to underestimate the violence that happens to them; guilt and shame often make women reluctant to talk about it, even to other women. However, attitudes and laws are beginning to change.

Individuals

It is possible for a woman to make a life for herself and her children that is not violent or abusive.

"Your first source of strength is yourself. Dealing with feelings of sorrow, pain and fear takes courage and energy. You can make this power work for your own good. When your partner puts you down, listen to the voice inside you that says "I'm a good person. I'm intelligent. I have friends who like me. I can do things on my own." Whether or not you decide to leave your partner, you may be able to protect yourself from getting a beating. Get a friend to help you figure out how to keep yourself safe. Can you tell when an assault is likely to happen? Are there little signs - slammed doors, insults, getting drunk? Do the assaults happen at predictable times - every pay day, every two months? When can you know an assault is coming, what can you do? Can you stay with a friend? escape from the house? remove weapons? Make a plan that feels safe to you."

"I'm a woman and I have to have respect for that woman. I don't have to go out and get beaten like that. The only one that can stop it and get help is me. When you ask for help, help will come from every direction. But it's really up to you."

"Another thing I learned in counselling is to deal with myself. I went for help for my children, but I received it mainly for myself. I am important, I can't take care of anyone else. I learned how to deal with my husband and stand up for myself. I started to get my self-esteem back and realized I was not responsible for my husband's actions. It was not my fault that he was abusive. As I continued to get counselling, I could sense a change in me for the better. This was not an easy or quick process for me. It took me over a year to work this out. Now I am living with my children on my own. I have a job and must scrape to get by, to make it. But I can proudly say I am happy in control of my life. My husband still shows up now and again and there are problems, but I am safe and he can't hurt me anymore."

"I've been on my own for six years now. I have a job and the kids are pretty well settled down. Sometimes I still have nightmares, but mostly I'm doing okay. I'm even starting to like myself. I'm becoming a human being again, instead of a zombie, and it's kind of nice."

Family

Some families are asking for and getting help. Some are starting to heal themselves. There is hope that the violence will end and the cycle can be broken.

> **"I know I did a lot of damage to my son for the first five years, but at least we're correcting it today. We don't have to yell at each other. Every day I tell him I love him; every day he tells me he loves me. He thinks the world of me; he's great."**

> **"We have a second chance. You can start again with your kids."**

Community

In the community, people are beginning to talk about and deal with the issues around wife abuse. There are now seven shelters and a few counselling programmes established. Some communities without a shelter have established a safe home network. Women's support groups and even a few men's support groups are available in some communities. Individual people are offering support and taking a stand. Interagency groups in some communities (which can include the RCMP, the nurse, social services, the women's group, the shelter, the schools, etc.) are working together to increase awareness and to deal with the problem collectively.

Workshops and public meetings are held at the community and regional level. Some community or regional groups have produced reports concerning the incidence of violence and the resources available (or not available) in that community/region. Groups have also produced some locally or regionally based resource materials.

"The best thing that happened to me was meeting another woman who had been through the same thing. I found out I wasn't crazy and I wasn't worthless and I wasn't the only one. She introduced me to a few other people, and gradually I started getting myself put back together. I wish I had met someone like her 10 years earlier."

"You don't have to keep on hating people for things that happened in the past. Life is too great to throw away on something that happened ten years ago. Learn from what happened to you, but don't go on replaying it."

Society

In 1968, for the first time, a spouse could be granted a divorce because of cruelty. In 1983, police were told to lay charges of assault in cases of "domestic disputes", if there is enough evidence. In 1988, the federal government announced their Family Violence Initiatives, which included $40 million for community projects. In 1989, a national conference was held in Ottawa to discuss wife assault and other kinds of family violence. Both community groups and government employees were present.

In the NWT, there was a "Task Force Report on Spousal Assault" in 1985. It heard stories from communities across the NWT and made recommendations for change. An action plan called "Choices" was then developed by the GNWT. "Choices" contained 43 ways to deal with specific aspects of wife abuse over three years, starting in 1986. "Choices" ended in 1989 and was not replaced. Since 1986, the Department of Social Services, GNWT, has funded shelters, counselling services, and community workshops through the Family Violence Prevention Program.

Public education materials, posters, and pamphlets have been produced, such as the "Spousal Assault Newsletter". There were NWT-wide conferences in 1986 and 1988.

* * *

A start has been made in recognizing the problem and providing some services. However, the myths and attitudes that allow the violence to continue are not changing very fast. Services remain grossly inadequate.

Society must recognize that the family is not just the private concern of a husband. What happens in a family is of concern to everyone and not just a man's own business. To stop wife abuse, men and women have to learn new ways to relate, ones that do not use violence as a way to solve arguments or express anger. We have to teach our children, both boys and girls, to share their feelings and express their anger in nonviolent ways.

Society needs to change the patterns and myths that we see in the ways communities respond. We need to stop denying that wife abuse happens, stop blaming the victim, stop excusing the batterer, stop isolating the woman and stop promoting the two-parent family as the only possible model for families. Society needs to become more realistic in how it deals with wife abuse. We need to find ways to help people, especially women, come to terms with violence. We need to make society better, by stopping the abuse of women.

"When you come out of the cocoon of hatred you're wrapped in ... God, you're the most beautiful creature there is. You can fly and see everything below you. And the freedom of having a second chance to live is coming at you all the time. You can enjoy the wind."

Do you know women who have made changes?

Can women help other women?
Can men help? Can communities help?

Who is responsible for stopping the violence against women?

MAKING CHANGES

Women Against Abuse
by Beth Camp

When I was eight and my sister seven,
we woke to the sound of argument.
We were paralyzed with fear and my mother
cried out no, no, no.
We listened to the sounds of hitting until
the dark night turned
to morning and he brought her to us.
We cried with her.
We washed her face
(It was battered,
she kept asking if her nose was broken,
the bastard)
and combed her hair so gently free
from tangles, the kind you get
when your head is yanked again and again.
We didn't know she was pregnant.

Nine years later he broke the front door down
with an axe and I called the police.
And my mother left this man.
There was
no cause for violence, no cause
for blood streaked on her cheek.

A man tried to beat me once,
only once. I am not a victim,
I will not cover my bruises with Erase, I will not
invent little accidents.
My sister is not as strong.
Sometimes we cry together.

All my life I've heard sad cries of helplessness:
the children, the house, no job, no place
to go, no one understands, the shame, the hurt,
the fear,
the hopelessness, the scars.
But, today, we have women's liberation,
the movement is not dead.
Thank you sisters, for the halfway houses,
for the places of refuge,
for the understanding. For we are all women against abuse,
we are women against abuse
everywhere.